

Clinical Research in Portugal and the Importance of Case Reports

Investigação Clínica em Portugal e a Importância dos Casos Clínicos

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Contemporary medicine is based on data. We use data to guide our clinical decisions on a daily basis. From rather simple routine things such as using a formula to estimate the glomerular filtration rate to compute a calcium score based on computed tomography angiography to guide statin treatment intensity.

Such a data-rich environment will likely increase in the near future as artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools become widely available (e.g., AI supporting for image interpretation, text mining, risk decision tools, etc.). Of course, the use of data in contemporary medicine is backed by large-scale clinical trials enrolling hundreds or thousands of participants comparing a new (“active”) treatment versus a placebo.

However, such an enterprise model is far from healthy. As the model is backed by private companies spending millions on large-scale trials testing new treatments, the model is intended to maximize profit. As such, comparisons with older and cheaper treatments, comparative effectiveness studies, or lifestyle interventions are undertested, underfunded, and underperformed.

The problem with this current model is that health-care systems may be spending much more than they should on treatments that may add little benefit to existing ones and patients are not receiving the best support from the health care system, for example regarding health prevention strategies and risk-based interventions.

Only investigator-led clinical trials can overcome these barriers with more pragmatic, patient-centered clinical trials. However, currently, Portugal does not have a dedicated strategy nor funding for investigator-led clinical trials and, beyond the potential excessive expenditure on healthcare resources, Portuguese patients are being treated solely on the basis of imported information from other populations. Moreover, Portuguese clinicians are seldom given the opportunity to perform clinical research and enhance their careers through clinical research. These issues have been detailed in a paper written by myself and others.¹

Beyond the aforementioned limitations and roadblocks, information from randomized clinical trials presents average effects and does not provide an answer for all individual patients nor all the clinical scenarios. Often, clinicians have to use their judgment and knowledge to try and solve clinical problems in a

tentative to provide the patient with a diagnosis and a potential treatment. As such cases are often challenging it is worth sharing them with the medical community because others may also learn from them and take the useful information forward when they see a patient with a similar presentation in their practice. This is the mission of the Sociedade Portuguesa de Medicina Interna (SPMI) Case Reports journal: to provide the reader with unique and challenging high-quality peer-reviewed case reports. The reader is incentivized to contact the journal and write comments on such case reports to further foster discussion and continuous medical learning and education.

In the current number of the Journal, we present four clinical cases and six images:

Clinical cases:

- A Peculiar Case of Neuroborreliosis
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease in an Internal Medicine Ward: A Case Series
- Hidradenitis Suppurativa: Two Successful Clinical Cases with Adalimumab
- Cryoglobulinemic Vasculitis Stemming from Delayed Recognition of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Images:

- Agenesis of Pulmonary Artery: Isolated Right Pulmonary Artery Agenesis
- Erythema Multiforme: A Rare Presentation of COVID-19
- Exuberant Localized Presentation of Mpox Infection
- Uncommon Debut: Orbital Pseudotumor as the Initial Presentation of IgG4-Related Disease
- Pott Disease
- Inhaled Cocaine and Tuberculosis: A Fatal Synergy

We hope the reader enjoys this issue of the Journal. And please contact us if you have any questions, doubts or simply want to share thoughts. ■

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